

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SANTO 03321 162133Z
ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5007
INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 3321

PANAMA FOR ROBERT PASTOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, DR
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH SANTO DOMINGO MAYOR ESTRELLA
ROJAS

1. FOLLOWING IS MEMCON OF AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION
WITH SANTO DOMINGO MAYOR JUAN ESTRELLA ROJAS THIS MORNING:

2. WHILE THIS WAS OBTENSIBLY A COURTESY CALL ON THE MAYOR,
I MOVED THE CONVERSATION AS DIRECTLY AS POSSIBLE INTO
DISCUSSION OF THE CURRENT ELECTORAL SITUATION. ESTRELLA IS
PROMINENT IN REFORMISTA PARTY CIRCLES (HE IS PRESIDENT OF PARTY IN
SANTO DOMINGO) AND IS SAID TO BE PARTICULARLY CLOSE TO THE
PRESIDENT'S SISTER, EMMA BALAGUER.

3. I TOLD ESTRELLA THAT WASHINGTON WAS VERY MUCH CONCERNED
BY CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS. WHILE WE RECOGNIZED THAT
CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES WERE STILL UNDERWAY, NEVERTHELESS
DEVELOPMENTS WHICH HAD TAKEN PLACE ON THE NIGHT OF THE
ELECTION, FOLLOWED NOW BY CONTINUAL DEVELOPMENTS IN
CONNECTION WITH THE JUNTA CENTRAL ELECTORAL (JCE) ITSELF,
WERE CREATING THE DEEPEST SKEPTICISM WITH REGARD TO
WHAT WAS HAPPENING. THIS WAS TRUE NOT ONLY OF EXTERNAL
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OPINION, AS HE KNEW. FOR EXAMPLE, WE WERE NOW GETTING
OVER 500 REQUESTS A DAY FOR ISSUANCE OF VISAS TO GO TO THE
U.S.; THE ECONOMY WAS BECOMING PARALYZED; TOURISM HAD
FALLEN OFF ALMOST COMPLETELY, AND THE NERVOUSNESS OF ALL
PARTS OF THE DOMINICAN POPULATION WAS ALL TOO APPARENT.
I SAID THAT WHILE WE DID NOT IN ANY WAY WISH TO BECOME
INVOLVED IN PURELY INTERNAL AFFAIRS, IT WAS NECESSARY TO

MAKE CLEAR THAT ANY EFFORTS TO OVERTURN OR NEGATE WHAT WAS WIDELY SEEN BOTH INTERNATIONALLY AND DOMESTICALLY AS A FAIR AND OPEN ELECTION, WOULD HAVE STRONG REPERCUSSION ON U.S.-DOMINICAN RELATIONS. I MENTIONED THAT THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF HAD NOTED THAT THE ELECTIONS HAD BEEN CLEAN.

4. ESTRELLA ACKNOWLEDGED THE TENSENESS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION. HE SAID THAT HE HAD KNOWN PRESIDENT BALAGUER WELL AND FOR A LONG TIME, HOWEVER, AND THAT HE HAD STRONG CONFIDENCE THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD NOT LET THINGS GO TOO FAR. HE SAID BALAGUER IS AN EXTREMELY COMPETENT POLITICIAN AND LEADER, THAT HE HAD NO DOUBT THAT BALAGUER WAS PREPARED TO TURN OVER THE PRESIDENCY, AND THAT IT WAS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO HOLD MANY PARTS OF THE REFORMISTA PARTY, AND THE MILITARY, IN LINE. ESTRELLA SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN AMONG THOSE IN THE REFORMISTA PARTY WHO HAD BEEN WILLING TO TURN OVER POWER IN THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE ELECTION. THERE HAD BEEN SERIOUS CHALLENGES RAISED ABOUT THE IRREGULARITIES IN CONNECTION WITH THE ELECTORAL PROCEDURES AND MANY IN THE PARTY DEMANDED THAT THESE BE INVESTIGATED AND DEALT WITH. I TOLD HIM THAT I THOUGHT FRAUD ON SUCH A SCALE WOULD REALLY HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO MANAGE WITHOUT PUBLICITY SIMPLY IN VIEW OF THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WHO WOULD HAVE TO BE INVOLVED. ANY NEW PROCEDURE, PARTICULARLY ONE USING UNFAMILIAR ELECTRONIC COMPONENTS, WAS BOUND TO HAVE FLAWS. CONFIDENTIAL

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THERE APPEARED TO BE NO REASON, HOWEVER, TO BELIEVE THAT THESE FLAWS DISADVANTAGED ONE PARTY MORE THAN THE OTHER. ESTRELLA SAID YES, A FRAUD ON THIS SCALE REALLY WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CONCEAL. NEVERTHELESS, THE REVIEW OF ELECTIONS IN SOME OF THE PROVINCES COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE CONGRESS. HE SAID THIS COULD BE IMPORTANT IN KEEPING CONTROL OF A SITUATION IN WHICH THE COUNTRY WAS DOMINATED BY A PRD WHOSE EVENTUAL LEADERSHIP WAS STILL AN UNKNOWN QUANTIFY. I TOLD HIM I KNEW WHAT HE WAS SAYING BUT THAT MY GOVERNMENT KNEW OF NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT IT COULD NOT WORK AS CLOSELY WITH A PRD GOVERNMENT AS IT HAD WITH THE DISTINGUISHED GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT BALAGUER. ESTRELLA SEEMED TO BE MOST INTERESTED IN THIS.

5. I TOLD ESTRELLA THAT FROM A PERSONAL POINT OF VIEW, THE WELL-BEING OF THE COUNTRY REQUIRED A CALMING OF THE

PRESENT SITUATION. PRESIDENT CARTER WAS DEEPLY INTERESTED BECAUSE OF THE GENERAL CONCERN ABOUT POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS HERE AND THE INFLUENCE THAT SUCH DEVELOPMENTS COULD HAVE ON THE DEMOCRATIC PATH THAT COUNTRIES

IN LATIN AMERICA WERE TRYING TO FOLLOW. THE REFORMISTAS' REACTION WAS UNDERSTANDABLE BUT WHAT WAS REALLY NEEDED WAS TO LAY THE BASIS FOR THE REORGANIZATION AND STRENGTHENING OF AN OPPOSITION PARTY OF THIS SORT WHICH SEEMED TO ME SHOULD BE THE GOAL OF ITS LEADERS. HE TWICE AGREED AND MENTIONED THE WAY IN WHICH POWER HAD BEEN TURNED OVR, SPECIFICALLY IN PUERTO RICO AND IN VENEZUELA OVER THE LAST YEARS.

6. COMMENT: IN VIEW OF OUR PAST EXPERIENCE WITH ESTRELLA, IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW WITH HOW MANY GRAINS OF SALT TO TAKE HIS APPARENT INTEREST IN THE DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC. HE DID SEEM TO BE TAKING IN WHAT I WAS SAYING, HOWEVER, AND SAID THAT HE WOULD SPEAK TO PRESIDENT BALAGUER ABOUT IT. I TOLD HIM I HAD AN APPOINTMENT
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WITH PRESIDENT BALAGUER AT NOON AT WHICH I WOULD EXPECT TO MAKE THE SAME POINTS AS I HAD MADE TO HIM. HE SAID HE WOULD NONETHELESS MAKE A POINT OF TALKING WITH THE PRESIDENT THIS EVENING.
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